

**Speech to Sustainability Forum  
September 7, 2001**

In January of last year, I had the honor of addressing the 1999 Founders of the New Northwest as they were celebrated as leaders, as risk-takers ... as bold prophets of the new century -- showing us by example what it will take to create a sustainable future. People like John and Jane Emrick of Norm Thompson; Neil Kelly, Julie Lewis of Deja Shoes, Brenda Mallory of Keepers, Inc, Monty Montgomery and the Izak Walton League and the folks at St. Vincent De Paul of Lane County.

They are people who have taken to heart and put into action the mission statement of Sustainable Northwest: to build partnerships that strengthen local capacity to promote environmentally-sound economic development in communities of the Pacific Northwest.

Five months later I signed an executive order directed at state government, but setting the goal for Oregon to be a sustainable state within one generation. The executive order was directed at the internal operations of state government to see what was possible, to gain some credibility in meeting this challenge, and to be an active partner with like-minded businesses and local governments.

And we have made great progress.

The state has developed sustainable purchasing guidelines for paper, office furnishings, building materials and other product groups.

We have created green building guidelines for all new state facilities including the use of recycled material, increased energy efficiency and on-site storm water treatment.

The state printing plant has developed an environmental management system for their 130-person operation, and they are now seeking certification of the system to the ISO 14001 standard. When certified, they will be the first state agency in the nation to receive such certification.

These actions by state government represent progress -- as do the actions being taken by the private sector. They are important steps toward a more sustainable future -- but they also represents the recognition of a larger truth: the interdependence of our economic and environmental needs. To me this relationship lies at the heart of sustainability -- and if we are to be truly successful in creating a sustainable future, an awareness of this interdependence must guide all of our work.

And yet, as our social, environmental and economic problems become more complex, our traditional governmental structures of law and regulation increasingly fail to recognize this relationship and, in fact often get in the way of it -- creating conflict and polarization instead of collaboration and a sense of community. It is on this problem that I wish to focus today.

I define sustainability as managing the use, development and protection of our natural, social and environmental resources in a way and at a rate that enables people to meet their current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. What is important to understand about this definition is that it requires that we recognize the interdependence between our environmental, economic and community needs -- that we find a balance between these often competing values.

Imagine, if you will, three overlapping circles -- one representing our economic needs, one representing our environmental needs and one representing our social or community needs. The area where the three circles overlap is the area of sustainability -- the area through which run all the elements of a good quality of life: a healthy, functioning natural environment; a strong economy with jobs and job security; and safe, secure communities where people have a sense of belonging and purpose and a commitment to each other.

These elements -- these threads, which together weave the fabric of sustainability -- are things we hold in common. They represent a common set of desires and aspirations that add value and quality to our lives. And our efforts to secure them has, at least in the past, been a joint undertaking that produced a kind of cohesiveness built on the recognition that the personal welfare of the individual is inseparable from the welfare of the community as a whole.

Today, however -- in ways both large and small -- these threads are beginning to fray and unravel. We are losing that cohesiveness and sense of common purpose that held us together in the past and allowed us to act as a community -- that allowed us to sustain the balance between these element important to a good quality of life.

Increasingly, we are viewing economic, environmental and community needs as separate, competing entities -- mutually exclusive values, if you will. Of course, this perspective undermines sustainability because it creates a politics of scarcity -- a zero-sum situation in which there must always be a winner and a loser.

We can see this unfolding in many ways: in the challenge of accommodating growth while maintaining livable communities; and in the tension between sprawl and development. Nowhere, however, is this more evident than in the growing conflict between economic activity and environmental stewardship.

The crisis unfolding in the Klamath Basin offers us a stark example of this trend carried to its logical conclusion: an economic, environmental and community disaster -- with 200,00 acres of irrigated farmland without water; inadequate stream flows and lake levels to support endangered fish and wildlife; and a community torn by fear, doubt, unemployment, anger, polarization and increasing acts of civil disobedience.

There are no winners today in the Klamath Basin -- and if nothing changes, the losses will continue far into the future. How could this have happened? How could we allow a situation to develop that simultaneously puts at risk our economic, environmental and

community values? The answer is instructive carries with it both lessons and implications for our effort to achieve a sustainable Oregon.

The underlying problem in the Klamath Basin is an over-appropriated water supply where demand exceeds availability. It is a situation which developed over many years through a series of actions -- all of which made some sense at the time they were made.

In 1864 the federal government negotiated a treaty with the Klamath Tribes, creating a reservation and reserving to the Tribes hunting, fishing and gathering rights.

In 1902 Congress passed the Reclamation Act, setting the stage for the huge federal western water projects of the last century, one of the first of which was the Klamath Irrigation Project started in 1905. Between 1908 and 1928 Congress established four National wildlife refuges in the Klamath Basin -- while homesteaders and World War I veterans began to farm the Klamath Project which continued to expand until 1966.

For the next 50 years peace reigned in the valley. The first hint of trouble came in 1973 when Congress passed the Endangered Species Act. This legislation, in a very real sense, grew out of a concern over sustainability -- specifically, the impact of our industrial and urban activities on the natural environment in which we live.

In 1988, the Lost River and shortnose suckers were listed as endangered species -- the first explicit signal that the pattern of water allocation in the basin was not sustainable. During the droughts of 1992 and 1994 farmers saw cutbacks in water supply for the first time in the 90 year history of the Project. But no action was taken to forestall the pending crisis.

In 1997, the Coho salmon was listed in the Lower Klamath River. But heavy snowfall in the basin in 1998 and 1999 produced enough water to cover all the competing demands -- and to perpetuate the myth that all was well. And again, no action was taken.

But in 1999, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the Bureau of Reclamation must meet ESA and tribal trust obligations in operating the Klamath Project. The stage was set for disaster -- and it came this year, triggered by the worst drought in Oregon's history with precipitation at only fifty percent of normal.

The question we should be asking ourselves about the situation in the Klamath Basin is this: why, if we all saw this coming, did we do nothing to forestall it? The answer is simple: none of the competing interests -- from irrigators to the tribes to the environmental community -- was willing to concede any part of their claim to work out a sustainable compromise. The politics of scarcity.

Instead, all the interests locked up in litigation and confrontation and nothing happened until we had the perfect storm of drought, ESA listings and tribal trust responsibilities. And now that the crisis is upon us, it is not going to be solved by a passing a new law or adopting a new regulation. And it is not going to be solved by a lawsuit -- no matter who

files it. Both sides have the legal tools at their disposal to ensure that nothing happens. But lawsuits do not often create resolution – they create winners and losers, especially where water is concerned. And they do not put more water into the basin.

Clearly, the only sustainable solution in the Klamath Basin must necessarily be a mediated one -- one in which all parties are willing to put something on the table – the irrigators, the tribes and the environmental community. And yet the interests remain locked into their positions, failing to see the interdependence they share -- all continuing to suffer.

What we see in the Klamath Basin represents the fact that, as our social, environmental and economic problems become more complex, our political system is reaching the limits of its capacity to meaningfully respond -- or, at the very least, that our politics have failed to adapt to meet these new challenges.

Let us remember that the word “politics” derives from the Greek word “polis,” meaning “city” -- or in more modern terms, “community.” That is to say, a group of individuals functioning together as a whole for their mutual benefit. In its original sense, then, “politics” referred to those activities necessary to sustain a community -- composed of individuals whose views and needs would not invariably coincide.

Our political system – or perhaps more accurately, our system of governance – grew out of the recognition that there had to be some way to regulate the ways in which people interact, precisely because their views, needs and interests would not always coincide.

And of course this implies that individuals have an equally important duty: they have to recognize that their own personal welfare is inseparable from the welfare of the community as a whole, and they must be willing to act accordingly, even if it means subordinating some of their own personal desires for the larger good.

As our next speaker Dan Kemmis has so eloquently pointed out -- the way in which this “larger good” was arrived at was a central point of contention during the drafting of the United States Constitution.

The first view was represented by Thomas Jefferson, who espoused what has been called the “politics of engagement,” a model in which people work together in a spirit of cooperation to find common ground and solve mutual problems.

The Jeffersonian model rests on the conviction that people are essentially reasonable, and will work to achieve the common good if they can agree on or be brought to understand what it is.

The second view was set forth in a set of documents known as the Federalist Papers, whose chief authors were James Madison, John Jay and Alexander Hamilton. In contrast to the Jeffersonian model, it embodies a “politics of disengagement,” wherein social

stability is achieved not by cooperation among individuals, but by a careful balancing of private interests, one against the other.

This model assumes that individual interests will inevitably clash, and that the role of government is to minimize or control these conflicts in a way that produces the common good. But the common good in this case is not the result of cooperation among individuals seeking common ground. Rather, it is the result of external, top-down management.

It was this second view that more or less prevailed as our nation developed. Certainly it is what Americans today have come to expect from their government, and what they now most resent about it. But more importantly – as we can see from the Klamath Basin -- this model does not resolve conflict -- indeed it often tends to encourage conflict. By no means does it foster a spirit of community or a sense of responsibility beyond narrow self interest.

People feel no obligation to learn about the needs of their community. Rather, they rely on government (or the courts) to manage conflict between individuals. Yet this “third-party” management invariably produces “winners” and “losers,” thus removing any incentive for individuals to cooperate.

Thus, the focus of the debate in the Klamath Basin is on: Who will prevail in the courts? Who will prevail in Congress? Will the winner be the farmers of Klamath County or the environmentalists? Will the loser be the community of Klamath Falls or the Endangered Species Act? Nowhere does our current political structure offer a place where people can come together to balance the needs of the larger community.

I am not suggesting that we start a revolution here – although Thomas Jefferson did say that “...”. What I am suggesting, however, is that there is a gap in our system of governance -- a gap that has everything to do with our ability to create a sustainable future.

The primary tools of government are laws, regulations and the allocation of resources. And with these tools government does many things very well. It provides infrastructure that fosters private sector investment and economic activity – everything from railroads to highways to water and sewer systems to telecommunications.

Government operates primarily through law and regulation . It enforces laws and incarcerates those who break them. It provides for the national defense, establishes health and safety regulations and maintains a system of public education.

What government does not do very well, however, is to bring people together to solve problems – especially when the problems are complex and the solutions require the participation of many people.

Watershed health is a case in point. In the past, the main threat to water quality has been point source pollution -- a problem that lent itself to government regulation. Today, however, the challenge is non-point source pollution -- runoff not only from agriculture and timberlands, but also from rooftops, driveways and yards in urban and suburban Oregon.

Reducing nonpoint-source pollution requires far more than simply passing laws and regulations. It requires a sustained environmental stewardship -- a long term commitment to change behavior -- by hundreds of thousands of people living in the watershed -- most of them living in the city. To accomplish this there must be a place to bring people together, to somehow see their common interest in assuming greater individual responsibility for water quality.

Likewise, to prevent development pressure and population growth from degrading our quality of life, there must be a place for state and local agencies, community leaders and business leaders to come together to ensure that investment are balanced and coordinated to produce livable communities.

Our ability to create such a place -- or places -- will largely determine our success in building a sustainable future. Let me give you some concrete examples of what may at first seem to be an abstract concept.

In Oregon, we have created a place to come together to improve water quality. It is called the watershed council -- created to fill a gap in our system of governance. Watershed Councils -- which form the heart of the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds -- exist as a recognition of the fact that while government regulation has an important role to play, there are limits to its effectiveness. Regulation can keep people from doing the wrong things but it provides no incentive for them to do the right thing.

Another example is the Community Solutions Team, which has created a place where people can come together to build livable communities.

I have recently begun to promote projects around the state which create this kind of place -- a place where people can come together to address problems through sustainable, community-based solutions which balance economic, environmental and community values. I call these projects Oregon Solutions and there are many examples.

The Metro Carbon Offsets project in which Nike, Intel, state and local agencies, the Climate Trust and the Oregon Environmental Council have developed a Carbon Bank to mitigate the effects of CO2 emissions.

The Sherman Wind Farm project in which an aluminum company, local ranchers, the Audobon Society and state and local agencies are developing a 25-megawatt wind power project.

The Wallowa County Sustainable Timber project in which a nonprofit in Enterprise is assisting local mills to utilize small dimension logs as a part of an effort to improve forest health and sustain family wage jobs.

A more complete list of these projects can be found on the web at [Oregonsolutions.net](http://Oregonsolutions.net).

And those of you gathered here today form the heart of this effort -- pioneering new ways to solve common problems and, in so doing, making progress toward building a sustainable future ...

The kind of progress that considers more than our own private interests, but understands that the welfare of others is vital to our own.

The kind of progress that does not regard compromise as weakness.

The kind of progress that sees diversity not as a threat, but as a treasure; an opportunity to enrich and strengthen the fabric of our society.

I thank you for your leadership -- and I offer you a new challenge.

What we are doing today is unique. Oregon is becoming the birthplace of a new way of conducting public business. We have built the foundation, and it is now time to build the structure that will give us a place to come together to solve the problems and seize the opportunities of today that our current government system cannot or will not address.

I need your help in creating a place that draws its strength from every individual, business organization and agency that steps forward to be part of creating a sustainable future for Oregon.

A place that links each of us with our community partners in collaborative problem solving rather than mortal combat.

A place that empowers citizen and business efforts to contribute to sustainable solutions rather than stifling them.

A place that rewards community efforts in self-governance rather than regulating them.

A place that is not based on Republican or Democratic party values but on community values.

A place focused on opportunities rather than mired in political and legal gridlock.

A place that restores our sense of community, our faith in ourselves -- and in our ability to come together and shape our common future.

Should this new place be a building? A new collaborative body of citizens? A virtual network like Oregon Solutions? And who should create this place? The government that has, in many ways failed? The private sector? The community? Or you?

These are the questions I ask you to focus on over the next few months. Because sustainability -- to be meaningful -- involves not only the recognition of the interdependence of our economic, environmental and community needs -- it requires a way to bring people together to balance these values in practical solutions to problems that are relevant to people at the community level.

Today in Oregon we are the beneficiaries of a proud heritage -- one that was created by those who came before us. To enjoy that heritage, without making the commitment to sustain it for future generations -- would be to forsake our roots and to forget what it means to be an Oregonian.

Our task today is to help create the new tools necessary to meet this challenge. And of one thing I am certain. If it cannot be done here in Oregon, it is unlikely to be done anywhere else.